

4-2009

# Associations between Caregivers' Global and Specific Attachment Representations and the Infant-Caregiver Attachment Relationship

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## Citation of this paper:

Hawkins, Erinn; Madigan, Sheri; Benoit, Diane; and Moran, Greg, "Associations between Caregivers' Global and Specific Attachment Representations and the Infant-Caregiver Attachment Relationship" (2009). *Psychology Presentations*. 11.

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# Associations Between Caregivers' Global and Specific Attachment Representations and the Infant-Caregiver Attachment Relationship

Erinn Hawkins, Sheri Madigan, Diane Benoit, and Greg Moran

Research supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

## ABSTRACT

The primary objectives of the current study were: (1) to determine the extent to which caregivers' conceptualizations of their own attachment history (global attachment representations) are congruent with the way in which they conceptualize their relationships with a specific child (relationship-specific attachment representations); and (2) to evaluate whether these relationship-specific representations play a mediating role in the intergenerational transmission of attachment. Prenatal assessments of caregivers' global attachment representations, as measured by the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), and relationship-specific attachment representations, as measured by the Working Model of the Child Interview (WMCI), were obtained in a sample of 196 mother-infant dyads. Infant-caregiver attachment status was assessed using the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) when infants were 12 months of age. Considerable correspondence was found between caregivers' global and relationship-specific attachment representations; however, there was no evidence for the mediational hypothesis. The current study makes a significant contribution to the literature as it represents the first attempt to directly evaluate the links between caregivers' global and relationship-specific attachment representations within the domain of caregiver-child relationships.

## INTRODUCTION

- **Prototype Hypothesis** (Fraley & Brumbaugh, 2004; Waters & Waters, 2006): attachment representations formed early in life serve as a cognitive prototype that has far reaching and enduring effects on one's conceptualizations of relationships across the life span.
- Although it has been postulated that caregivers' representations of their own attachment history strongly influence representations of their relationship with a specific infant (c.f., Moran & Pederson, 2000; Zeanah & Anders, 1987, pg. 247) this hypothesis has not yet been investigated directly.

■ The prototype hypothesis suggests that conceptualizations of one's attachment history forms a global attachment representation that shapes one's expectations of subsequent relationships, which in turn influences the nature and quality of those relationships

■ Thus, it is hypothesized that a caregiver's expectations of her relationship with her infant might mediate the association between global attachment representations and the development of the infant-caregiver relationship

### Study Purpose:

- (1) To establish the degree of congruence between global and relationship-specific attachment representations
- (2) To explore the extent to which caregivers' expectations of their relationship with their child mediates the association between global attachment representations and the infant-caregiver attachment relationship

## METHOD

### Participants

- 196 mother-infant dyads
- 94 girls, 102 boys
- Middle class, community sample

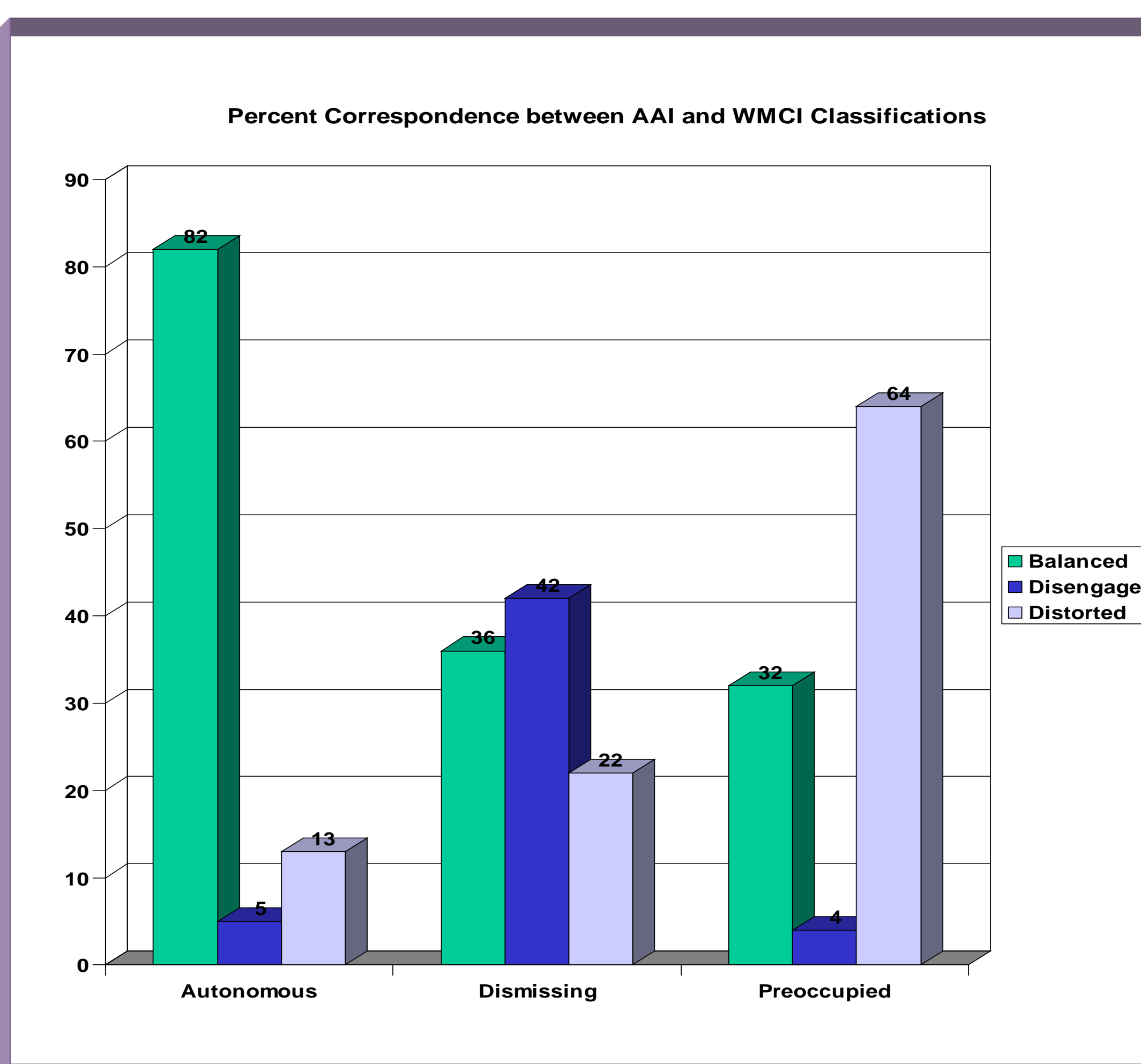
### Measures and Procedure

- 1) **Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)**; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985; 1996)
  - Administered prenatally
- 2) **Working Model of the Child Interview (WMCI)**; Zeanah, Benoit, & Barton, 1986)
  - Administered prenatally
- 3) **Strange Situation Procedure (SSP)**; Ainsworth et al, 1978)
  - Administered when infants were 12 months old

## RESULTS

1) There was significant congruence between global and relationship-specific attachment representations (see figure)

- 70.2% of cases corresponding as theoretically expected ( $k = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cramer's  $J = .46$ ).



2) There was no evidence of mediation (see table)

- AAI classifications were significantly associated with SSP classifications, and with WMCI classifications
- However, when controlling for AAI classifications, the association between WMCI and SSP classifications was not significant.
- The link between AAI and SSP classifications was not reduced when controlling for WMCI status

Binary Logistic Regression Analyses Examining Caregivers' Relationship-Specific Expectations as a Mediator between Global Attachment Representations and the Attachment Relationship

Predictors ratio (95% CI)	B (SE)	Wald's	Odd's
Equation 1a			
Constant	-0.35 (0.20)	2.89	
AAI	1.98** (0.35)	32.41	7.26 (3.67-14.37)
Equation 2b			
Constant	-0.60** (0.21)	8.24	
AAI	1.82** (0.33)	31.34	6.18 (3.27-11.70)
Equation 3b			
Constant	-0.72** (0.26)	7.55	
AAI	1.71** (0.35)	23.54	5.55 (2.78-11.10)
WMCI	0.27 (0.36)	0.56	1.30 (0.65-2.62)

Note. a outcome variable is WMCI classification. b outcome variable is SSP classification. \*\*  $p < .001$ .

## CONCLUSIONS

- Caregivers' current conceptualization of their attachment history has a particularly strong impact on their prenatal conceptualizations of their relationships with their own children
- Although caregivers' attachment representations constitute an important antecedent in the development of infant-caregiver attachment relationship, caregivers' expectations of their relationships with their infants did not mediate the association between their global attachment representations and the infant-caregiver attachment relationship

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